

An inclusive arts initiative

A practical good example of access for artists and audiences

by Foteini Galanopoulou

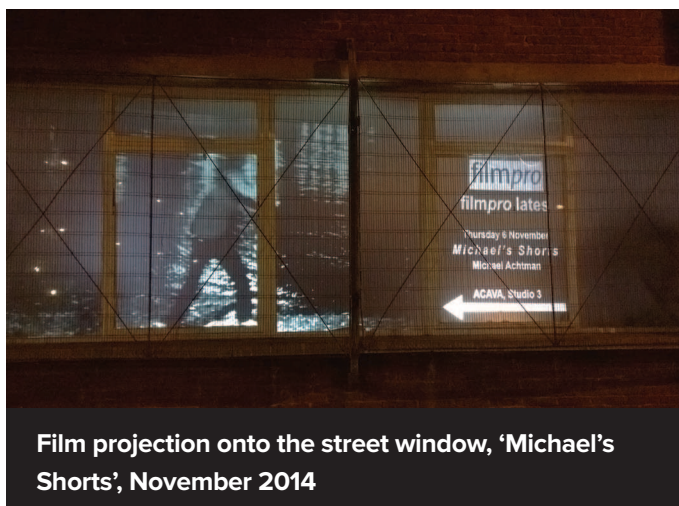
In September 2014 a new artistic venture began in East London called 'filmpro lates', a series of monthly events putting access at the heart of the creative process.

Since their inception the events have showcased an incredible array of disabled and non-disabled artists. The artwork presented has varied from film, music and video installations to live art, interactive performances, cardboard sculptures and paintings. 'filmpro lates' are run on an entirely voluntary basis, with significant contribution of time, skills and access expertise by everyone involved in making the events happen.

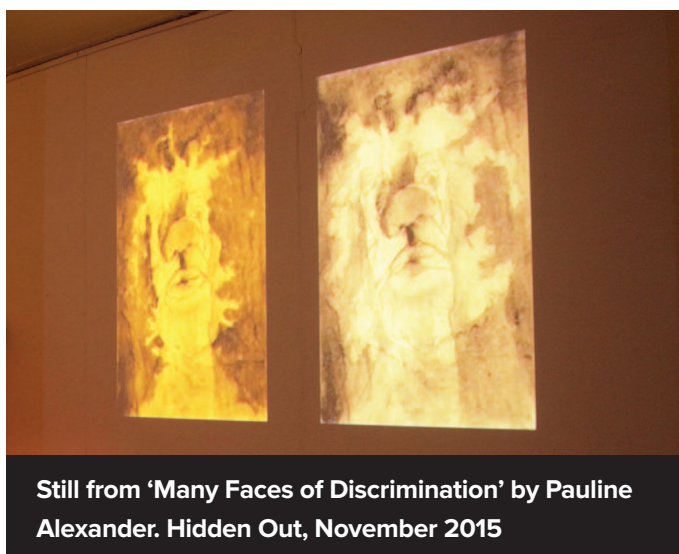
A safe, creative platform

Independent artists often seek dialogue with the public and with other artists to nurture their creative practice and professional development. However, access to the arts sector is not straightforward and can be a daunting experience particularly for many disabled artists, either at the start of their career or after a long break. 'filmpro lates' help to fill the gap by offering a supportive, inclusive and safe environment with a 'can do' attitude and sound understanding of individuals' access requirements. Simple things such as asking 'What do you need?' and 'How will this work best for you?' make it an inclusive experience for the artists from the start. The plain question 'How can the event best serve your artistic vision?' ensures the featured artist has ownership of the event and actively uses it to materialise their ideas, instead of being required to meet certain targets. For half of the participating artists so far, their 'filmpro lates' event was their first solo showcase and a stepping stone in their practice.

A 'filmpro lates' event is a disability-friendly experience. Apart from the basic building accessibility – sometimes defined or limited by the building itself – live Audio Description and British Sign Language support are always available, provided by suitably skilled members of the curatorial and production team. When a film with dialogue is shown, subtitles are also available.



Film projection onto the street window, 'Michael's Shorts', November 2014



Still from 'Many Faces of Discrimination' by Pauline Alexander. Hidden Out, November 2015

Occasionally the events have been used to explore a specific theme relating to access, such with 'Film Audio Description: the making of' in December 2014.

Audiences were invited to learn about and explore the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of audio describing a film or moving image. Selected films and videos were used as best practice examples and others were available for audiences to test how they would describe them for visually impaired viewers. Some of the filmmakers were also present on the day and attempted to audio describe their own work.



Film projection on to the ceiling from the premiere of 'Everybody Says it's all in Your Head', August 2015

In parallel to the above, through a 'filmpro lates' event the showcased artists are also prompted to consider accessibility of their work in practical terms, such as the difference subtitles can make to a range of audiences: deaf/hearing impaired people and anyone for whom English is a second language. More importantly, they are encouraged to make access provisions an integral part of their next art project and seek the right partnerships or funding for it.

Connecting art with the urban environment

The event space is a non-traditional gallery venue provided by filmpro ltd, a disabled-led film and digital art agency based in Hoxton, Hackney. Its studio is part of a 1960s' industrial building on Cremer Street that has been converted into artists' studios and is now managed by the Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art (ACAVA). The building is home to numerous independent artists or small art companies, who need a space for their creative practice or to run their business respectively.

Every month, the office layout of a normal day at filmpro ltd is switched to a small art gallery within a couple of hours and for one night only: all furniture is pushed to the side and neatly covered; a big wall turns into the main film screen; in the corners occasionally there is a monitor or an old TV set playing films; the windows, the floor, the ceiling may also serve as projection screens; the studio and corridors transform into a live art stage. The building comes to life and becomes an integral part of the experience. Local residents and businesses – as well as other artists-tenants of the same building – embrace this initiative and become frequent audiences

Some of the highlights

2001

A video performance by Juan Soto

Negotiation Between Madness and Sanity

A video installation by Zeynep Dagli

Everybody Says it's all in Your Head

A film by Johnny Hourigan and Clare Bottomley (London premiere)

Z EyeZ – AKA ZombiyeZ in Zagreb

An immersive cinema experience by Extant performing arts company (London premiere)

themselves. Almost intuitively, the events have nurtured a need to re-engage with the (urban) surroundings, associated with home, work, shopping or just usual itineraries from/to a place. Eventually, artists and visitors reclaim a relationship with the urban environment and London's disappearing industrial heritage.

A changing landscape

At the time of writing, the Cremer Street building managed by ACAVA is planned to be converted into residential flats from next year. Artists and creative agencies renting a studio are expected to evacuate the premises in the first quarter of 2016. Similar developments are seen across London as a result of the housing crisis. Meanwhile escalating rents for artists studios, make it difficult to secure a suitable studio for their practice or business in London. This poses a significant risk for the city's cultural landscape as a vital component of urban life, local art economies, are shrinking or disappearing. The real impact on the arts scene and communities is yet to be seen.

Amid this uncertainty, 'filmpro lates' will inevitably be affected until a new home is found in 2016.

'filmpro lates' are curated and produced by Foteini Galanopoulou, with the support of filmpro ltd

For further information, reviews and updates go to www.foteinig.net/category/filmprolates or www.filmpro.net/filmprolates